

# NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

*Called the greatest challenge facing the United States at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, homeland security has fundamentally reshaped governmental priorities, and altered consideration of numerous federal, state, and local programs. The September 11 attacks focused American attention upon countering terrorist threats as never before. But homeland security encompasses much more than the work of intelligence, defense, and law enforcement agencies, and solutions must be evaluated in an overall context of national preparedness for a wide range of challenges facing America. Are homeland security strategies affordable and sustainable? What impacts will new homeland security funding have upon other important programs, such as education and health care? What are and should be the roles of government, the private sector, and individual citizens? How may homeland security strategies be “designed into” existing multipurpose agencies and programs to enhance and sustain overall preparedness for a number of varied challenges? The National Preparedness team’s mission is to assist Congress in addressing these issues and bolstering the nation’s ability to fight terrorism. We are doing so principally by harnessing and leveraging GAO’s expertise in national preparedness and by advancing knowledge in areas of emerging importance. We also assist Congress in considering the broader fiscal and social national context within which the debates over homeland security strategies will continue to occur.*

## Our Work

We are different from other GAO teams in that we are charged with coordinating and blending together the extensive expertise developed across the agency on homeland security issues as well as with finding new and innovative ways of conveying and applying this knowledge.

This work spans more than 100 national preparedness engagements, including those examining international counterterrorism efforts, the Department of Defense’s role in homeland security, strategies to counter money laundering, state and local preparedness, laboratory security, food security, cargo vulnerabilities, anthrax detection technologies, satellite security, nuclear power and chemical plant security, financial services cyberthreats, customs inspections, critical infrastructure protection, border security, and defenses against weapons of mass destruction.

At the same time, much of our work is focused on identifying new sources for GAO information and bringing together experts to develop formulas for national preparedness. For example, we recently worked with a panel of commercial and government experts to identify ways federal agencies can strengthen their contingency plans and streamline reorganization of agencies and programs.

### KEY CONTACTS

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## *Accomplishments and Key Projects*

Although we are a new team, we have already made significant progress in leveraging and advancing GAO's homeland security expertise. This year, for example, we

- established a virtual team linking knowledge and expertise across the GAO mission teams on homeland security and national preparedness topics;
- created and implemented innovative Web-based collaboration and knowledge management tools to enable better matrixing among GAO teams;
- partnered with experts external to GAO to address emerging issues, such as use of digital satellite imagery to prepare for a wide range of threats, lessons learned from private sector mergers and integrations to guide the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and best business practices of the private sector and selected governmental entities on topics ranging from cargo security to continuity of operations; and
- brought GAO's messages to numerous external audiences, including other federal agencies, private sector organizations, and state and local government officials and organizations.

National Preparedness will continue to be involved in the creation and implementation of the proposed Department of Homeland Security, combining 22-23 federal agencies into the third largest Cabinet agency, as well as with the implementation and further development of the national strategy to combat terrorism. We will also continue with our consulting practice model, assisting other GAO teams while also engaging in our own "leap ahead" work to address existing and emerging issues in the rapidly changing homeland security environment.

For the National Preparedness team, Border and Cargo Security, Critical Infrastructure Protection, and Bioterrorism will remain as important program issue areas, and Fiscal Affordability and Sustainability, Performance Metrics and Accountability, Government Reorganization Implementation, and Impacts upon Non-Homeland Security Programs will continue as major management challenges to be addressed.